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Title: <bodytext=green>Remnants of Wildfire

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The following is a fictionalized account of a Knight of Serpent's Hold and her experiences with the effects of Wildfire.

Corinne of Serpent's Hold lived in Britain only briefly, aiding her countrymen as they suffered from the dreadful Wildfire.

Corinne's story is presented here in full.

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#### Part One

Corinne stared out from the prow of The King's Mercy, as the huge Britannian ship cut through the rolling waves. There was no need to look back; much of the island was already aflame with the unnatural green and gold of Wildfire. Soon there wouldn't be much left above the rocky ground of the island, if the burning continued. Her tabard whipped about in the wind as the ship sailed on toward the promised safety of the capitol.

In spite of herself, she did turn back; but only to look at the decks cluttered with refugees and the remaining healers of Serpent's Hold. Their absent lord may have sent this help from the

City of Britain, or perhaps it was the King himself, but at last something was being done to help the sick and weary folk of the Hold. They huddled together against the wind, the healthy comforting the sick. Those who were ill seemed almost to burn internally. Their eyes bright with fever looked anxiously about, and they scratched at marks on their skin that looked almost green. Resolutely, Corinne focused on each face - ignoring the smoke spiraling up in the distance behind the ship.

Too few of the faces on board belonged to her fellow Knights. Some stayed behind in hopes of winning the strange war being fought with magic as well as with steel; and too many more were already lost entirely. Only Mark and Magnus stood among the refugees; Magnus self-consciously holding the hand of his young bride Sheila. Corinne had reluctantly agreed to make this journey, being a merchant's daughter and familiar with the sea. She had also visited Britain several times, accompanying her parents. The southern waters were often infested with pirates and smugglers - so a small force was urged to take the journey, to protect the refugees. The ship's crew made no promise of safety.

Those of the Hold were glad to run their own affairs, allowing no King's Governor to rule; but

they enjoyed trade with the wider world. Of late, they were grateful for the warriors of that wider world coming to fight the creatures of Wildfire. Perhaps they sought treasure or glory, but, whatever the reason, their presence did hold back the creatures for some time. The Governors of Britannia had even placed an aid station, to ease the strain that so many more injured fighters would place on the island's small corps of healers. Supplies had been coming in steadily, though with this latest battle Corinne thought they'd seen the end of this aid. Even in the Hold, they had heard about healers coming together in Britain to help those fighting Wildfire. Corinne hoped these healers would be able to help her countrymen aboard this ship.

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Many days later, The King's Mercy delivered her desperate passengers and the few things they carried away from Serpent's Hold. Those who could walk, disembarked into the busy streets of the capitol. Those who could not, were carried by litter into the city. Corinne helped carry litter after litter. Soon, the permanent healers' quarters were overrun with the sick, and temporary healing stations were set up throughout the city. Healers arrived from Minoc, Skara Brae, Vesper, Yew, Jhelom, and Trinsic. Mages from New Magincia and Moonglow tried magical means to

heal the sick. At best,  
their combined efforts  
could protect some folk  
from becoming ill - but  
for many, it was too late  
to stop the strange  
disease.

Corinne lost track of how  
many errands she'd run  
for the healing stations  
since she arrived - trips  
to the alchemist (the  
black-bearded mage from  
New Magincia was  
especially particular about  
herbs and potions), the  
weaver's for bandages,  
and even out to the  
nearby farms to collect  
other special items  
needed. She'd lost track  
of her fellow Knights  
until she quite literally  
ran into one between the  
healers and the bakery on  
the northwest side of  
town. "I'm so sorry!" she  
exclaimed, picking up her  
packages destined for the  
healers nearby. Then she  
stopped and looked up at  
the man she'd just  
stumbled into on the  
street.

"Mark!" Corinne froze. The  
man she knew never  
looked like this. His  
bright eyes glittered in  
his drawn face. He paced  
restlessly, the tabard  
hanging loose from his  
hunched shoulders.

"I don't know what's going  
on with me," he said  
slowly. "Do I know you?"  
He began coughing. "Can  
you help me?" He reached  
out and grasped her arm  
with surprising strength.  
"Help me!"

"I'll help you, she said,  
"come with me to the  
healers - they're close  
by." Corinne glanced over

at the humble building  
just steps away.

He looked at her without  
recognition, still gripping  
her arm. "So you won't  
help me, then... I  
understand. I understand  
everything." He drew his  
sword.

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## Part Two

Corinne broke away and  
stepped back from Mark.  
He dropped the weapon  
and covered his face with  
his hands. "I don't know  
what's going on with me,"  
he said again.

"Mark..." Corinne caught  
the sword hilt with her  
heel and drew it away  
from her comrade. She  
picked it up, noticing the  
spots of rust that had  
begun to form on the  
once-bright blade. "Come  
with me," she said in a  
comforting tone. "let's go  
in to see the healers."

Once Mark had been  
placed in the care of the  
healers (and his sword  
given into their care as  
well), Corinne went out to  
try and retrieve her  
packages. The sunlit  
streets were an odd  
contrast to her mood.  
Only one parcel was  
missing, and of course it  
was the herbs for the  
New Magincian mage, but  
she returned to the  
herbalist to refill the  
order.

Deliveries finally

completed, Corinne crossed Mage's Bridge to the eastern side of the city, intending to visit the beautiful fountain in the park - such places did not exist in Serpent's Hold. It was evening; she judged the time to be close to seven o'clock, when she heard the rumble of voices coming from a building close by. The Cavalry Guild's doors were open to the mild evening, and she could see a small crowd within. She edged closer to listen.

The Governor of Britain stood at the head of the table inside, her lantern creating shadows among the crowd. Warriors from diverse companies, and even some guild mercenaries, jostled one another for space in the small meeting area. Corinne slipped into the back of the crowd, her back uncomfortably close to a rack of practice weapons. She hadn't stood among so many trained warriors since leaving Serpent's Hold, before the Wildfire manifested underground. She began to relax among them. Standing where she was, she could just see the Governor, framed by a window at the back of the hall.

"Citizens and friends," the Governor called out, "Thank you for coming tonight with your concerns." The room quieted, and a formidable-looking macer bowed his shaved head as he gave a salute.

"Governor," he said, "I don't like these crowds in

the streets. There are too many folk what don't belong!" General muttering arouse in the room. The man held up one armored hand. "What are ye' doing about them?"

The Governor smiled. "We are treating them, sir, with the best medicine and magic we can. Some folk are recovering well, and a few have already sailed back to their homes."

"Not enough!" cried someone in the crowd. The murmurs rose until the room was filled with general chatter as everyone gave an opinion on the matter of the refugees. The Governor raised up her lamp until the noise died down again.

"Everyone," she said, lowering the lamp to the table, "calm is needed. It is a strange malady, and we have a duty to help those who come to us for aid. I, too, am concerned about the crowding of our streets, and the influx of people needing help. I'm not certain, but I think this disease is magical in nature. I think it has something to do with Serpent's Hold."

Suddenly, Corinne noticed something moving beyond the window behind the Governor, and heard the unmistakable sound of steel on steel. "Beware!" she shouted. All looked to the windows, as a battle unfolded before their eyes.

"To Arms! To Arms" called the Governor, "Britain is under attack!"

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The assembled crowd rushed out of the building, to a horrible sight. Healers from the nearby temporary station lay dead upon the ground, and their patients fought each other and anyone approaching with a zeal that made no sense, given their condition. Their eyes glowed with a brightness beyond fever, and they moved with unnatural speed. The greenish gold of the Wildfire infection covered much of their exposed skin and they shouted incoherently as they fought.

"Team up!" shouted an archer, a woman with dark hair and a grim expression. "Don't engage alone!" Immediately, a swordsman ran to her side, and together they approached the melee - the archer clearing a path for her companion. The warriors began to gather in pairs and small groups. Corinne found herself beside the macer who'd spoken in the Guild hall. They nodded at one another, and started toward the fight.

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Corinne and the macer (she never did learn his name, though his colors suggested he came from Jhelom) splashed water on their grimy faces at the fountain behind the Cavalry Guild. The ground was littered with the dead. The Governor was healing the injured with some type of magic;



Corinne didn't trust it  
but it seemed to be  
effective. The group  
began to breathe again  
when faint cries for help  
could be heard in the  
distance.

"Our healers!" cried the  
Governor, "what if this is  
happening at all our  
healing centers?" Realizing  
the truth of this awful  
possibility, the assembled  
warriors split up to  
check the remaining  
healing stations; south and  
west into the busiest  
parts of Britain.

Corinne and her unnamed  
companion stayed  
together. They joined the  
archer and swordsman and  
made their way across  
the bridge to the  
western part of the city.  
Unfortunately, Wildfire  
had indeed affected more  
of the sick in this way -  
they fought like demons  
against anyone nearby. At  
the third station she  
came to, Corinne saw  
Magnus among the  
injured; he bled from  
several wounds but  
seemed generally whole.  
She tried to pull him to  
his feet, but he would  
not stand.

"Corinne," he said  
brokenly, "my wife... I  
cannot..."

"Speak, man!" Corinne still  
held his hands in hers.  
"What are you talking  
about? Where is Sheila?"  
Her eyes widened as she  
realized what he must  
mean. "Is she...?"

Magnus nodded, closing his  
eyes against the memory.  
"She's near the bank; I  
cannot harm my bride,

Corinne. She gave me these wounds... I... I came here to fight instead."

Corinne's companions looked at one another, and in the direction of the bank a few streets away. Magnus pulled his hands free. "Corinne, you must go. I can't... not my bride..." He looked up. "Do you recall the golden demons of Fire? The speed they had?"

Corinne nodded. "Paragons, they called them."

"My Sheila - her eyes... they have turned gold. I cannot accompany you, but I understand what must be done." He bowed his head.

Corinne left Magnus, hurrying to catch up with her group. The archer laid a sympathetic hand on her shoulder as they approached the area near the bank. The group peered around the corner of the tailor shop, to see the crumpled form of Magnus' bride. The fancy dress she'd been so proud of was tattered and stained. Her golden eyes stared sightlessly up toward the darkening sky.

There was no time to grieve. Shouts came from the north.

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The man - creature? - standing in the street was barely recognizable as Mark, surrounded by the fallen and screaming with rage. Fending off blows from all sides, he seemed intent on the destruction

of all. Cloak and tabard  
whirled about as he  
lunged at anyone  
approaching with the  
broken, bloody sword in  
his hand.

The company of four  
noticed two mages trying  
to heal those in the  
melee while protecting  
themselves with fields of  
energy, and they ran to  
join them. The archer  
stayed with the mages,  
keeping the lesser beings  
of Wildfire at bay while  
Corinne and the rest  
faced the foe. Corinne  
felt strangely ...invincible...  
and she turned to see  
one mage had taken out  
a lute and was playing  
music that had the taint  
of magic. There was no  
time to be concerned,  
however, as she found  
herself being shoved back  
by the macer. "You'll get  
us all killed!" he growled.  
She drew her sword and  
formed up with the two  
men.

Arrows glanced off the  
being's platemail. His eyes  
glowed golden in the  
fading light. There was  
nothing left of Mark as  
he struck and parried; no  
grace, no humanity. He  
was terrifying.  
Corinne and her  
companions crept forward,  
looking for any advantage.  
The air around them  
sparkled with magic and  
the cobblestones were  
slick with blood and gore.  
With unspoken agreement,  
they leapt into the fight.  
The mace landed with a  
sickening sound, swords  
slashed at the armor's  
joints and the  
unprotected areas  
revealed by the  
disintegrating armor.

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Although it seemed to  
take forever, the actual  
fight was relatively short.  
The combination of steel,  
magic, and expertise was  
eventually too much for  
the foe. The being fell  
with a roar, still swinging.  
When it was over,  
Corinne fell to her knees  
beside what had once  
been Mark, Knight of  
Serpent's Hold.

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Corinne stood aboard The  
King's Mercy once again,  
this time headed for  
home. She still  
accompanied the refugees  
from Serpent's Hold,  
though far fewer than  
had sailed to Britain for  
aid. Still, more than  
two-thirds had survived  
the strange effects of  
the Wildfire Plague, as it  
was being called now.  
These people were now  
healthy and well-fed,  
clothed against the chill  
winds of the voyage, and  
hopeful of seeing their  
homes again. It was said  
in Britain that the  
creatures of Wildfire had  
finally been overcome,  
save for some few left  
in the Fire Dungeon.  
Even now the warriors of  
Britannia were clearing  
out the dungeon caves  
and preparing to return  
to their own lands.

She looked into each  
face, finally finding  
Magnus among those  
seated against the

starboard rail. He remained in his armor and uniform, staring out at the waves, but Corinne knew that he planned to resign when they reached the island. Word had already been sent home about the way Wildfire had ravaged some of the refugees. Those on the island knew that some would never return. The Governor of Britain, with the King's blessing, had insisted on pyres for the dead in hopes of containing the plague. It appeared to have worked; no evidence remained of the strange disease. Healers and mages had begun to return home from the capitol, and soon the survivors would be reunited with their families.

What would the future hold; adventure, despair, joy, the simple tedium of everyday life? Corinne turned back toward the prow, searching the horizon for the familiar shape of home.

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Corinne's story makes for quite an adventure, and I hope you have enjoyed reading it.

In speaking with her, we agreed that this book should be dedicated to those who fought to free Serpent's Hold and the Fire Dungeon from these awful creatures and their

plague, and to those who provided supplies and other assistance to those fighting.

May we ever come together when the need arises.